

Don't Let Your Cat Go AWOL!



Indoor Cats are Safe Cats

Military bases often struggle with how to manage domestic cat populations. Frequent transfers of personnel often means cats are left behind, abandoned to fend for themselves. Lucky cats find a new human, but most are not so fortunate. Abandoned cats face many dangers: being hit by cars, starving, freezing temperatures, disease, and more. If not spayed or neutered, cat populations can explode. Free-roaming cats kill native wildlife, including many rare and endangered species, and can also threaten the health and safety of military personnel and their children. Base commanders must deal with how to humanely and cost-effectively resolve the issue of too many free-roaming cats. ***As a cat owner, you are an important part of the solution.***

The Skinny on Cats

Domesticated in Egypt over 4,000 years ago, house cats are descendants of the European and African wild cat. Now considered a separate species, *Felis catus* was introduced all over the rest of the world by European explorers and settlers. Recent estimates place the U.S. pet cat population at 73 million. No one knows how many stray or feral cats are out there — best estimates range from 60 to 100 million.



Cat killing a Yellow-rumped Warbler at a bird bath. Photo: Gil Ewing

Links

Stray cats are lost or abandoned by their owners.

Truly feral cats live entirely on their own without any human assistance.

A female cat can have two to three litters per year, with four to eight kittens per litter.

Keeping Cats Indoors Is Good For People

Stray cats often congregate around a food source such as garbage dumps and mess halls, or where people leave food out for them. They can be a nuisance around base housing, where people may feed birds, tend flower gardens, or have children's sand boxes. Outdoor cats are exposed to many diseases and parasites, some of which can be transmitted to people: [Rabies](#), a deadly virus, can infect cats, wildlife, and humans. Outdoor cats are more likely to contract rabies than any other domestic animal. [Cat-scratch](#)



Cats kill common animals such as chipmunks. Photo: Microsoft

[Disease](#) is transmitted from cat to cat by fleas, and from cat to human by a scratch or bite. While cats show no symptoms of the disease, it can cause severe illness in people. [Toxoplasmosis](#) is caused by a tiny parasite found in the intestines of cats and in the tissues of many animals. People can contract this disease by not washing their hands after coming into contact with cat litter or soil contaminated with cat feces. If contracted by a pregnant woman, abortion of the fetus or blindness or retardation in the newborn can result. Cats can also transmit [fleas](#), [roundworm](#), and [hookworm](#) to humans. In the southwest, cases of the most lethal form of [plague](#) in humans have been linked to outdoor cats.

[Next](#) [FAQs For Cat Owners](#) [FAQs For Base Commanders](#) [Links](#) [Press Release](#)